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ABSTRACT

Educational foundations programs remain ill-defined despite generations of discussion. A review of the literature over the past three decades indicates that foundational studies are frequently subject to criticism and devaluation as irrelevant, serving no useful purpose, lacking a rigorous body of knowledge, and in general, poorly taught. Students often consider courses in theory less practical than courses in instructional methods or subject matter, and most students lack the philosophical perspective for analysis, or the experience to understand and relate to the material. The literature, however, also indicates that educational foundations rightfully belong in the teacher education curriculum and may be seen as the bridge between general education and pedagogy. An example is given of an undergraduate foundations course at a small East Coast state university that was made relevant by tying it to the real world of education. In addition to traditional course elements of history, philosophy, sociology, finance, and governance, students were required to attend a school board meeting, interview an education official, and spend time in both a special education and a regular education classroom. Though students had anticipated that foundations courses would be uninteresting or irrelevant, informal evaluations indicated that students found the material both relevant and interesting, and they predicted it would prove useful in their preservice teacher education. The findings suggest foundations studies can provide a counterbalance to a preponderance of skill training in the preparation of preservice teacher candidates. (Contains 22 references.) (ND)

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Foundational Studies in Teacher Education

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Educational foundations programs remain ill-defined despite generations of discussion. For the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), foundations of education are humanistic and behavioral studies (1982, 1986, 1987, 1990). Textbooks with foundations in their title often include history and philosophy of education, educational sociology, educational psychology, comparative education, economics of education, political science, finance, anthropology, aesthetics, and moral and ethical considerations, all as they relate to education. In this paper, I comment on some of the views of critics of foundational studies from the past three decades, describe briefly a program to counter some of these criticisms, and reassert the legacy of foundational studies.

Criticism and Devaluation

Foundational studies are frequently subject to criticism and devaluation. For Conant (1963) they are not a rigorous body of knowledge but rather an *attempt to patch together scraps of history, philosophy, political theory, sociology and pedagogical ideology* (p.117). He referred to them as eclectic courses and suggested their elimination, for not only are they usually worthless but they give education departments a bad name (p. 117). He believed teachers require knowledge in the specialized disciplines organized for such studies and advocated that preservice candidates *study philosophy under a real philosopher* (p.131).

Critics range across the spectrum from those seeing foundational studies serving no useful purpose (Conant, 1963; Smith, 1980) to those supporting their retention of condition of changes in content, format and/or delivery (Broudy, 1967; Arnstine, 1973; Cruickshank, 1985). Koerner (1963), a most outspoken critic of foundational studies, believed the humanistic and philosophical foundations of education were tainted. He did not want prospective teachers wasting time on philosophical views about education since he believed that they are *an act of faith not closely related to observable, measurable phenomena ... abstruse by nature and lend themselves more to persuasion than to proof* (p.72).

Smith (1980) wrote that *the basic* [teacher preparation] *program should be shaped by a single overriding purpose; namely, to prepare prospective teachers for work and success in the classroom ... Every course should be scrutinized with respect to its contribution to this end* (p.40) Courses not obviously relevant, according to Smith, should be excluded from the teacher preparation program. *Candidates for deletion would be introduction to education, history of education, philosophy of education, social foundations of education, and a host of others* (p.40).

Howsam and his colleagues (1976) faulted both the content and teaching of foundations courses: Foundational courses are *taught as separate disciplines in such a way that students fail to see the interplay between theory and practice* (p.187). They recommended changes making foundations less obscure and more interdisciplinary. Teachers of foundational studies should adopt a more *human service, functional, problem-based approach featuring 'theory in practice' modes of inquiry* (p.88) and become more involved with education practice in an effort to make such studies functional.

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In brief, foundational studies have not enjoyed a good reputation. In my review of the literature I found few authors enthusiastic about either their content or their delivery.

Why the Lack of Enthusiasm?

Students often consider courses in theory less practical than courses in instructional methods or subject matter. Arnstine (1973) hypothesizes that the lack of interest in humanistic foundations in teacher education lies in the general antipathy people have for theory. Most preservice students lack the background in philosophy to utilize the philosophical perspective for analysis and have little time to develop this perspective. Discontinuity exists between the form in which faculty present foundational material and the expectation of what students will accomplish with the material. Students often acquire knowledge at the verbal level but are asked to utilize it at an analytic and problem-solving level (Gagne and Briggs, 1979). Specialists in history, philosophy or sociology of education teach their disciplines as a *de facto* body of knowledge before preservice teachers have had the opportunity to experience the problem arena and the school climate for the application of that knowledge.

Past experience may blunt the effect of foundational studies on preservice students. Lortie (1975) argued that what students learn about teaching is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical. Personality often influences their educational theory; the imitative approach is often more powerful than the theoretical.

Broudy (1963) believes the source of the malaise is in the possibility that the nature of foundational courses is misunderstood and therefore vulnerable to critics. Others fear foundations faculty are out of touch with life in the schools. Their commitment to subject matter disengages them from the problems of the schools and the concerns of teachers who might consequently relegate them to being academician outsiders and thus irrelevant (Conrad, Shiman, & Nash, 1973; RATE II, 1989).

A Rightful Place in the Curriculum

Criticisms of the content and delivery of educational foundations abound, but the majority of the authors whose work I reviewed paradoxically conclude that educational foundations rightfully belong in the teacher education curriculum and must be seen in perspective. Prospective teachers acquire general knowledge in liberal arts and pedagogical skills and professional knowledge in their specialty areas, but they lack a method to grasp the overall structure, processes, and function of this knowledge. Howell and Shimahara (1969) and Cruickshank (1985) see foundations as the bridge between general education and pedagogy. Broudy (1967) holds a similar belief that *educational foundations courses are essential for the understanding and interpretation of the educational enterprise as a whole* (p.22). Arnstine (1973) proposes that their purpose is to *give theoretical perspectives to teachers in order that they may become intelligently critical of their own and others' practice* (p.7). Howell and Shimahara (1969) describe educational foundations as an interdisciplinary attempt to study the multi- sided perspectives of education built on the contributions of various disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities.

Learned societies, accreditation agencies, and certification agencies have expressed views on the subject of educational foundations. The Philosophy of Education Society (1980)

proposes that educational foundations concern *principles, criteria and methods used in making practical judgments used in education* with the focus on *clarifying, understanding, justifying and evaluating proposed ends and means in education* (p.265). The document goes on to make this distinction: *Behavioral studies promote understanding of the scientific aspects of practicel judgment through the findings of psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and political science. Humanistic studies relate educational concerns to their historical development and to the analytical, interpretive and normative (ethical) perspectives and methods associated with the philosophical study of education* (p.265).

The 1982 NCATE Standards point out that *The major purpose of such studies is to provide the student with a set of contexts in which educational problems can be understood and interpreted* (p.17). The Standards make the further point that students may acquire a familiarity with the content of humanistic and behavioral studies either through course work as part of their teacher education curriculum or by studying the parent disciplines. More recent revisions of the NCATE Standards (1986, 1987, 1990) reaffirm the position of humanistic and behavioral studies in the teacher education curriculum.

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC, 1981) expects that *the beginning teacher shall have completed a program that provides for the development of insights into child and adolescent psychology* and an understanding of *the broader problems of the profession as they relate to society and the function of the school* (p.18). In addition, *the program shall require study of the leaders, ideas and movements underlying the development and organization of education in the U.S.* (p.19). If for no other reason than that of fulfilling these and similar requirements, foundational studies hold a place in the teacher education curriculum.

Why Study Educational Foundations?

Reasons for the study of the foundations of education range from pragmatic to idealistic. Broudy (1963) affirms that foundational knowledge puts educational problems in their correct context and *prevents our being naive and provincial about them. It is the antidote to localism and narrow technicalism* (p.53). He subsequently (1967) contended that foundational studies help the teacher interpret the pedagogical task but may not be sufficient for its execution. Cruickshank (1985) contends that foundational studies coursework should undergird teacher education. He argues that foundations are the most suitable vehicle to enable the preservice teacher to understand the complex activity of teaching.

Butts (1973) believes the ultimate goal of foundational studies is normative and judgmental: the ability to solve problems and improve educational policy and practice. If education is integrally involved with social concerns and with culture, then foundational studies can be seen in context. Levit (1973) expressed a similar view in insisting that foundational studies focus *on the critical, comparative and comprehensive evaluation of socioeducational policies* (p.27). Foundations provide the opportunity to raise questions in the teacher education curriculum: What type of school for what type of society? With the rest of the curriculum crowded with courses in technique and content, foundational studies provide the opportunity to examine the purposes of education, to evaluate these purposes, and explore realistic alternatives.

What Should Be Studied in Educational Foundations?

Professional fields of study may be distinguished by the way they organize learning around problems distinctive to the profession. Broudy (1963) named the problem areas in education: educational aims, the curriculum, school organization, administration and support, and teaching and learning. Disciplines shedding light on these problems are history, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. The 1982 NCATE Standards, noting that certain issues in education can be illuminated through understanding of their historical development and related to philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics and political science, produced a listing almost identical to Broudy's (1963) taxonomy.

Perdew (1969) suggests organizing foundational studies by asking educational questions: *How important is education? How educable is the human being? What is the description of the educated person? Who should educate?* In Perdew's estimation a careful study of these and other questions will provide the preservice student with data and methodology from history, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, economics, and other disciplines.

Howell and Shimahara (1969) argue that the study of foundations should be grounded in the study of crisis: the study of the social disorders of our time. Public education must deal with social disorders on a daily basis and undergraduate teacher trainees must come to grips with their civic responsibilities before they actually assume teaching responsibilities. Education for Howell and Shimahara is about social continuity and shared social responsibility to overcome the frustrations generated by social disorders. Thus, they argue, foundational courses ought to be organized to prepare students to inquire into contingent needs of society.

Conrad, Nash and Shiman (1973) take an idealized view of educational foundations and those charged with imparting this knowledge. In their judgment, foundations professors must engage students in examining the intellectual underpinnings of education. This approach emphasizes the dynamics of change and decision making in educational settings and suggests a radical departure from the traditional image of the foundations professor. *He [sic] would be committed to the promotion, among students and colleagues, of a constant state of creative disequilibrium .... He [sic] should play the role of Socratic gadfly in dialogue with colleagues and community* (p.43). The task is to raise questions, challenge assumptions, and provoke discussion. Conrad and his associates charge foundations professors with the momentous task of providing teacher education with *a coherent sense of enlarged purpose and meaning* (p.55). Spaulding (1988) suggests a merging of foundations with methods courses where students will *engage in effective methodological decision making informed by these intellectual traditions* (p.5). She believes this merging of the theoretical and the practical may help remove the anti-intellectual stigma from methods courses and the irrelevant label from foundations courses.

What Are They Saying?

These and other scholars are saying that educational foundations courses foster an interpretative, normative, and critical understanding of schools and teachers in contemporary society. They also caution that foundational studies are more attitudinal than substantive, that *the sociology or even the psychology of education, for example, will not directly help the second-grade teacher to manage her slow learners ... although it does prevent [her] being*

naive and provincial about them (Broudy, 1963, p.53). They believe that the use of social theory will clarify the function of the teacher. A critical examination of beliefs and values that guide practice is essential to effective teaching. Foundational studies provide a framework for analyzing beliefs about the aims of education, subject matter, the nature of the learner, and the teaching-learning transaction. These scholars also believe that education is necessarily subject to change initiated both by the community and the teaching profession.

Those who defend foundational studies say that teachers grounded in these studies are better able to make effective decisions about how to instruct their students and manage their classrooms. Conversely, teachers trained in programs emphasizing practice and abandoning theory will be less able to think broadly and flexibly about their task, their methods, and their contribution to the community.

Problem Areas in Foundational Studies

While general but not universal agreement exists that foundational studies belong in the preservice teacher curriculum, significant problems exist. The following problems are evident in the literature.

- Preservice teachers have difficulty in relating theory-based material to the problems of classroom practice and see foundations courses as less practical than courses in instructional methods or in subject matter.
- Faculty charged with teaching foundational coursework are not usually involved with field experiences, which they may perceive as outside the function of the discipline.
- There is a lack of consensus regarding content in the various domains of foundational studies rendering it difficult to set standards for the preparation of teachers in foundations.
- Faculty unprepared in foundational studies often teach the courses. Shea and Henry (1986) contend, *The incidence of personnel insufficiently trained in foundational studies who are teaching foundations courses has reached epidemic proportions* (p.10).
- Foundational courses are usually designed to communicate the knowledge of a given foundational domain. They rarely show the preservice teacher how foundational knowledge supports specific instructional and managerial practices.

Tying Foundations Studies to the Real World of Education

These considerations are central to the program in undergraduate foundations studies at a small East Coast state university whose aim was to make an introductory foundations course relevant by tying it to the real world of education. In addition to the traditional course elements of history, philosophy, sociology, finance and governance, preservice students were required to attend a school board meeting, interview a school administrator, state education official or state legislator, and to spend time in both a special education classroom and a regular education classroom.

Students then took the initiative and located and attended board meetings, interviewed administrators, and selected classrooms to visit. They established an informal information network, pooled transport, and adjusted schedules and subsequently attended board meetings, observed schools and interviewed administrators and teachers in four states, amassing both formal and anecdotal evidence.

In their written reports, students focused on specific aspects of each experience.

School board meetings provided insights into philosophical positions, finances, personal agendas, local politics, confrontation and compromise and the level of public awareness. Administrators provided them with personalized statements of aims and the scope of their responsibilities as well as printed school mission statements. Individual teachers spoke to them of their hopes and frustrations, of their successes and the limitations imposed by the system.

Students identified behaviorist educators in special education classrooms and progressive educators in regular elementary classrooms. They interviewed administrators identified with the essentialist position and middle school teachers who claimed that work load demands forced them into the essentialist mode. Students who completed their assigned tasks in parochial schools reported elements of perennialism. In subsequent class sessions students shared their experiences and insights. A number of students explained the impact of local history on school board policy and practice.

Individual students discovered the antecedents of a local school district consolidation, the method of levying property taxes, arguments for and against standardized achievement tests, the demographics of ethnicity, the variety of compensatory education programs available in schools, and future employment prospects. Class members who reported that they did not find the composition of the school board representative of the local population had to back their judgment in class deliberations. Others who found that an excessive amount of time at board meetings was devoted to monetary discussion were reminded by the more pragmatic members of the class that education has to compete for its share of the public purse.

These assignments provided grist for a full semester of foundations coursework and became reference points as the class progressed through such topics as Federal, State, and Local Control of Education. Much of the student contribution into a class discussion on 'Local Control, Myth or Reality?' came from student reminiscences of that evening at the school board meeting and their interview with the school administrator. Two students who had met with and interviewed a state legislator provided a different perspective.

Informal student evaluations at the conclusion of the semester produced interesting insights. Some mentioned that they entered the course with trepidation occasioned by the thought of having to study philosophy. Others had assumed that foundations course would be uninteresting. In their final analysis students agreed that the material had been relevant and had caught their attention. They predicted it would prove useful in the further stages of their preservice formation. Our intent in this course and in our assessment of it was to offer an alternative to what had preceded it and to conduct some informal inquiry as to its value to students. In subsequent semesters we hope to conduct much more rigorous assessment.

The Legacy of Foundational Studies

Foundational studies can provide a counterbalance to a preponderance of skill training in the preparation of preservice teacher candidates. Teacher educators clearly understand it is a risk to teach skills without relating them to the theory that gives then relevance, or as Whitehead (1950) observed, *the development of abstract theory precedes the understanding of fact* (p.75). When students do not understand the intellectual basis for a method of teaching, their work becomes mechanical, or as Arnstine (1973) expressed it, *without study in the foundations, teaching is merely the habitual application of a set of routines* (p.14).

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